Chapel Talk – November 15, 2016

Beginnings the Founding of WPS

On Sunday past the Woodside Priory community celebrating a Mass of Thanksgiving in honor of the first Mass by Father Egon 60 years ago in the ranch house where Founders Hall is now.

You have heard the story of our pioneer seven Founding Monks – fleeing Hungary during the Communist persecution in the late 1940s – coming to America – land of the free and home of the brave – immigrants to a country that provided a safe haven. They were welcomed by Benedictine Abbeys on the East coast and in the Midwest and worked there until they knew the language and culture better - then Fr Egon set out on a trek a journey to find a home for he and his confreres.

That journey ended at 302 Portola Road with the establishment of the Monastery in 1956 and the school in 1957 – in the town of Woodside, there was no Portola Valley back then, that would not happen until 1962 – so could have been called Portola Valley Priory but the Monks wanted to stay with the original name – better local recognition

Back then it was not easy to get to the Priory – no 280, this was a land of cattle, horses, farms and ranches – we did not even have a address just a Post Office box in Menlo Park; their friends and fellow Monks back in Europe thought they were in the wild west and asked them in letters if they saw cowboys or Indians

From a very small start – 9 students in 1957, 13 graduates in 1961- the Priory grew in every way possible. They followed a European model of education with a strong emphasis – Science, Math Modern language, Religion, Latin was required and half a day of school on Saturday.

We are a start-up, backed by 1000s of investors who saw the potential and value of an education provided by the Benedictines.

We are truly blessed by the faith of our Founders;

We are a gift that keeps on giving – from MS and US years throughout the rest of your life

God has tested us over the years and we have responded – both as individuals and as a community – Fr Egon called the Priory “an American Miracle” – immigrants coming to a new land, navigating a country and culture that was foreign to them but never giving up, with a very strong faith in God that their Dream would become a reality and it did.

They lived our learning competencies 4Cs and R -- they had to be resilient to survive.

I arrived here in 1989 – first time in California after spending the previous16 years working at schools in the Midwest – cool exotics locations like Paducah Ky, Chippewa Falls Wis, Kansas City Missouri, Tulsa OK and Saint Louis – went West and found myself in the promised land and landed at the Priory as the Dean of Students;

We had 13 Monks and 11 lay faculty and only 110 boys – 50 of those boys lived in the dorms – 25 in grades 7 and 8 – no 6th grade yet – we were small, very small but the OSB values were the same and we were definitely a “community where everyone is known and loved”.

Divine Providence - the Founding Monks saw the hand of God in many events that allowed them to continue as a school; a loan payment due on Tuesday, no money in the bank and a check arrives on Monday this happened over and over – God was watching over them – their faith and belief in diving providence allowed them to keep the doors open.

Read excerpt from American Benedictine Review – Fr Egon

Next the word Amazing – the whole Priory beginnings is really an amazing story and I wish to share two tidbits

let’s talk about -1981 and Art Evans - founded a company that builds the world’s fastest sit down lawn mowers – The Dixie Chopper and we own one – it travels at speeds up to 35 miles an hour; can cut up to 9.2 acres in an hour, which is about 9 FB fields; it has models named Iron Eagle, Silver Eagle and XCalibur- zero turn radius, 3 year bumper to bumper warranty and includes cell phone and iPod adapters (can make you coffee, comb your hair and brush your teeth) and in our quest to be as GREEN as possible our model is propane driven with two propane tanks next to the driver’s seat and gives the impression that you are sitting on a jet engine. There is a full harness for the driver and this thing literally flies around the field cutting everything in its path, sadly we have found a few 6th graders in its wake – it is truly an AMAZING creation of American ingenuity.

Amazing #2 – There is a newspaper article in our archives - it says October 16, 1974 -- – bold print Priory Beats Stanford Frosh 2-1 – in soccer –

So in a game where the mascots at that time would today not be politically correct – the Huns beat the Indians in an epic soccer contest of huge historical significance – a HS BEAT a college team, not to be repeated by any other HS in the area – EVER -- that was an amazing feat for this small all boys Catholic HS – to vanquish the mighty Stanford team and in this case the word amazing may not do that victory justice. And what is more amazing the goalie on that team was tough, quick, never say die player by the name of Joe Montero!

Our history – all of you share a part of this history; we celebrate a personal history woven into the history of the Priory community- it is our school; we give time, talent and treasure to ensure the promise of a bright future – WE ARE PRIORY and know that there is STRENGTH in NUMBERS!

Every time you walk into a classroom there is a black and white picture next to or near the door that shows the Priory way back then; 50s, 60s, 70s – they look funny, make us laugh and shake our heads, it is like when we look at pictures of ourselves when we were little – you just say that can’t be me—so from our perspective of 2016 they are so old school so during this week of celebrating the past do stop for a moment and take a gander at the communal history of the Priory. Those students in the pictures went on to Stanford, Berkeley, Harvard, MIT, they got jobs, got married had children and some of them sent their children to the Priory – who have sat among you in the past or sit among you today.

We are proud of our past, excited about a limitless vision, direction and future of WPS.

We celebrate so much this year and are very grateful for the blessings of the Monks, past and present- they are the wind beneath our wings

Father Pius – once the youngest now the oldest Monk and as he said Sunday not sure which is better—lifetime language teacher – Latin and German, great sense of humor and a favorite of students of all ages – he left Hungary with only a briefcase and his journey would eventually lead him to Portola Valley in 1960

Father Maurus – left his homeland at age 18, left his family and friends, couldn’t tell them he was leaving, not even his mom or dad, travelled to Canada and came to America, connected with the Benedictines and the Priory in 1963- was a dorm director and taught Biology for over 40 years;

Father Martin – left his homeland of New Jersey and Saint Anselm to come west and seek his fortune/strike it rich – and oh what a fortune it was and what riches he has accumulated—a Monk of many gifts, a man of faith and hope and a giver of love to all he meets;

Our Men in Black – are in one sense our Spiritual Mascots, they are our are best players, they are our cheerleaders, they are our coaches and since 1956 their contributions and impact on the Priory are immeasurable.

In my mind there is only one way to end this talk and to show our Priory spirit and that would be – give me a P-R-I-O-R-Y!